

Thomas M. Bolin, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (New Collegeville Bible Commentary)(Collegeville: The Liturgical Press), 2012.

The slim stature of the present volume in terms of its physical size (it is just 112 pages cover to cover) does not even remotely reflect the weight of learning it possesses. Bolin has accomplished in a few pages what other commentators haven't managed to do in many, many more: he has clearly and intelligently; insightfully and meticulously communicated the sense and context of two of the Bible's most misunderstood and misrepresented texts.

Bolin's audience is the basically informed reader of the Bible. His use of charts and maps and his several pictorial representations of various important objects is neither too little nor too much. Were it too much, the volume would resemble a comic book and were it too little, the reader would be left without sufficient background information for a proper understanding of the text of the Bible.

Bolin's book begins with a survey of the usual introductory matters: the historical and theological importance of Ezra and Nehemiah; a brief overview of the Persian Empire; the question of sources; their relationship to the books of Chronicles; and their place in the canon.

Bolin also addresses the historical background and, from my perspective the most interesting subsection of the introductory chapter, 'Literary considerations and ancient history writing'. Bolin deserves the 'understatement of the year award for the sentence which introduces this subsection:

The author may have had other priorities than historical accuracy (p. 14).

Indeed! Bolin goes on to do an absolutely brilliant job of explaining the differences between modern conceptions of history and ancient Israelite conceptions of history.

The introduction concludes with a description of the theology of Ez/Neh.

The commentary proper features a dual column at the top of the page which contains the biblical text underneath which is the commentary itself. The biblical text is the New American Bible, revised edition, and Bolin doesn't argue with it. He simply illuminates it.

Especially noteworthy and particularly well done are the following segments:

Ez 9:1-2 The crisis of mixed marriages.

Neh 3:33-4:17 Opposition from Judah's enemies.

Neh 5:1-13 Social and economic problems.

Neh 9:1-37 Public confession of sin.

Neh 13:23-30 Mixed marriages.

Bolin's conclusion draws it all together and even brings into focus how our Christianity has influenced our reading of Ezra and Nehemiah (and how we have understood the 'Law' in general) and yet he asserts that a fair reading, an accurate reading can

... show [us] vividly the responsibilities facing all who claim to walk the path of the God of Israel, and how walking in that path can lead to hope and joy (p. 105).

This is a tremendously well written book. I recommend it without reservation.

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